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BUSINESS METHOD FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE OF SERVICES

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TECHNICAL FIELD

5 The invention relates to business methods for assuring
quality services and particularly to delivering information
technology services which have a high quality assurance.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Providing information technology services has become an
important part of business activity. Businesses recognize that
having high quality information technology services are essential
15 to operating their businesses in a competitive fashion. Various
service providing companies compete with each other in
formulating bidding for and delivering these services to their
own and other companies. It is therefore also essential that
these formulating, bidding for, and delivering aspects of the
20 information technology service be carried out with high quality
if a service providing company is to be successful in this
competitive area.

5 While quality techniques have been applied in the operation
of various businesses, including primarily hardware manufacture,
little attention has been directed to quality processes in the
service business area. Keane, in U.S. Patent 5,737,581 describes
a product flow monitoring system including quality assurance
10 measures. Turnbull, in U.S. Patent 5,208,765 describes a method
and structure of a product development monitoring system in which
the process is divided into stages including quality assurance.
Stapleton, in U.S. Patent 5,537,483 describes a quality assurance
feature of an image processing system. Ertel in U.S. Patent
15 5,307,262 describes a data quality review method and system in
the health care environment. Tucker et al. in U.S. Patent
5,432,218 describe determining quality levels for fabrication and
assembly designs of a manufactured product. Motai et al. in U.S.
Patent 5,644,493 describe forming a quality control instruction
20 table on the basis of a manufacturing drawing of the product.
Miyakawa et al. in U.S. Patent 5,717,598 describe a
manufacturability evaluation method to be employed while
designing an article.

25 Unfortunately, none of the above quality systems apply to
assuring the quality of solutions in the service industry or more
particularly in the information technology service industry.

5 Information technology services include but are not limited
to, selecting and providing workstation hardware, software
operating systems and applications, server hardware and software,
network and communication hardware and software, installation and
maintenance of the above hardware and software, help desk
10 operation, user training and education, on site and remote
support, providing personnel and management to perform the above
tasks. The services may also include developing, installing and
maintaining a custom application for a customer.

15 In accordance with the teachings of the present invention,
there is defined a new method of assuring the quality of a
services solution.

It is believed that such a method would constitute a
20 significant advancement in the art.

OBJECTS AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

25 It is therefore a principal object of the present invention
to enhance the service solution providing art by providing a
quality assurance method for formulating, proposing, and
delivering such services in a high quality manner.

5 It is another object to provide such a method wherein the profit objectives of the providing business are met.

 It is yet another object to provide such a method wherein the customer need is satisfied.

5 These and other objects are attained in accordance with one
embodiment of the invention wherein there is provided a method
for a services solution, comprising the steps of, defining a
first solution by a provider having a business objective, for a
customer having a need, performing a first assurance review of
10 the first solution to determine whether the first solution is
technically viable, deliverable, and includes technical risk
identification, assessment, and containment plans, performing a
second assurance review of the first solution to determine
whether the first solution includes complete schedules, a
15 complete cost and profit case, and the first solution satisfies
both the provider business objectives and the customer need,
defining a second solution by the provider, by correcting any
deficiencies identified in the first or second assurance reviews,
thereafter, performing a first readiness review of the second
20 solution to identify new issues or risks which arose during the
obtaining customer commitment step, determine whether delivery
plans are established, and establish baselines for performance
and the profit case, periodically performing a project management
review to verify the second solution is being managed as defined,
25 meeting the profit case, and meeting the customer need, and
thereafter, performing a deliverable readiness review to verify
that the second solution has been delivered to the customer and

5 that the second solution satisfies the customer need.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

10 The FIGURE shows a flowchart of a method of assuring quality
in accordance with the present invention.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

15 For a better understanding of the present invention,
together with other and further objects, advantages and
capabilities thereof, reference is made to the following
disclosure and the appended claims in connection with the
20 above-described drawing.

 In the FIGURE there is shown a flowchart describing the
steps of a preferred embodiment of the present invention.
Although the steps are shown in serial fashion for ease of
25 explanation, there is no sequential limitation implied other than
indicated in the appended claims. In addition some steps may be
optional.

5 In step 12 a first solution for a customer need is defined
by a provider business having a business objective. The customer
need is preferably a need for information technology services by
a company as explained above. The first solution defines the
services, hardware, and software which will be provided to
10 satisfy the customer need. The business objective includes a
profit target but may also include overall revenue, hardware and
software sales, personnel utilization, market share, and new
business.

5 In step 14 a first assurance review of the first solution is
performed. This review and all subsequent reviews is defined for
the purpose of this specification to mean conducting a meeting to
inspect, view, examine, or the like, written materials. The
meeting may be held in person at a scheduled time and place but
10 may also be held by teleconference, videoconference, or via a
computer network or internet connection of the participants.
Written materials may include text, graphs, figures, pictures, or
video whether in hardcopy printed form or stored in computer
readable form or in a format suitable for presentation. This
15 first assurance review determines whether the first solution is
technically viable. Technical experts may be called upon to
evaluate the first solution in light of the needs of the customer
and take positions on the technical feasibility and soundness of
the solution. This review also determines deliverability which
20 is taken to mean the ability to deliver the first solution on the
planned schedule using the financial and personnel resources
identified in the first solution. This review also includes a
technical risk identification with appropriate assessment and
containment plans. Technical experts may also be used in this
25 part of step 14.

5 In step 16 a second assurance review of the first solution
is performed. This second assurance review has a business
emphasis in contrast to the first review just described which has
a technical emphasis. During this second assurance review, it is
determined whether the first solution includes complete and
10 acceptable schedules and definition of work scope, and a
complete and acceptable cost and profit case including
contingencies and business risk. Whether the first solution
satisfies both the provider business objectives and the customer
need is also determined in the second assurance review of step
15 16.

 In step 18 a second solution is defined by the provider.
Any deficiencies in the first solution identified in steps 14 and
16 are corrected in this second solution. Correction may involve
20 revisions to the scope or schedules for services as specified in
the first solution of step 12.

5 In step 20, which is optional, a third assurance review is performed. The purpose of this review is to determine whether the second solution defined in step 18 properly corrects the deficiencies identified in steps 14 and 16. Depending on the number or seriousness of these deficiencies this review can be as
10 extensive as the first and second reviews or it can be brief or completely eliminated if for example only minor deficiencies were identified.

 In step 22 a commitment is obtained from the customer to the
15 second solution. This commitment may take the form of a signed contract to purchase the services defined in the second solution. It may also be a statement of intent, letter of authorization, or other type of business commitment satisfactory to the provider.

5 In step 24 a first readiness review of the second solution
is performed to identify new issues or risks which were not part
of the second solution but which arose thereafter, for example
during step 22 of obtaining customer commitment. It is also
determined whether delivery plans are established. Delivery
10 plans include plans for project management, schedules, and
available resources. Delivery plans may also include plans for
communication, organization, tracking, change control, and
reporting. Baselines for performance and profit are also
established in step 24. A baseline is a measure of the expected
15 level based on the second solution plans.

 In step 26 a project management review is performed
periodically to verify that the second solution is being managed
as defined, that it is meeting the profit case and that it
20 continues to meet the customer need. The frequency of performing
this review may vary widely depending on the results of step 24
and any previously performed project management reviews.

5 In step 28 a deliverable readiness review of the second
solution is performed to verify that the second solution has been
delivered to the customer and that the second solution satisfies
the customer need. This step is normally performed by experts in
the subject matter of the second solution and may include
10 inspection of project files and interviews with key supplier and
customer personnel.

 While there have been shown and described what are at
present considered the preferred embodiments of the invention, it
15 will be obvious to those skilled in the art that various changes
and modifications may be made therein without departing from the
scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.